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HOW TO LAUNCH A COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

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TEN HIGH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS IN DUPAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS, HAVE SHOWN HOW TO PERSUADE TAXPAYERS FROM DIVERSE DISTRICTS TO VOTE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JUNIOR COLLEGE. IN 1964, AFTER STUDYING THE STATE MASTER PLAN, THEY AND THE BOARD MEMBERS OF EACH DISTRICT HIRED A FIRM TO MAKE A FEASIBILITY STUDY. THE BOARDS SELECTED 19 CITIZENS FOR THE STEERING COMMITTEE, WHICH HAD TO GET OUT THE VOTE THREE TIMES--TO ESTABLISH THE COLLEGE DISTRICT, TO ELECT THE BOARD, AND TO AUTHORIZE $10 MILLION IN BONDS FOR SITE AND BUILDINGS. A PETITION FOR THE ELECTION WAS CIRCULATED AND ADDRESSED TO THE DUPAGE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. BUSINESS CONCERNS CONTRIBUTED FUNDS FOR THE CAMPAIGN. DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARDS SUBMITTED NAMES OF PEOPLE FOR A CITIZENS' COMMITTEE IN EACH AREA. THE CHAIRMAN OF EACH COMMITTEE FOLLOWED CLEAR DIRECTIVES AND AN EXACT TIMETABLE FOR CLUB ADDRESSES, NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS, AND BLOCK-TO-BLOCK CANVASSING. A PUBLICITY COMMITTEE HANDLED SPEECHES, LITERATURE, AND ADVERTISING. THE ILLINOIS JUNIOR COLLEGE BOARD RECOMMENDED STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION APPROVAL OF THE PROJECT. THE PUBLIC HEARING WAS HELD IN OCTOBER AND THE FIRST REFERENDUM IN DECEMBER. SUSTAINED PUBLICITY AND PERSONAL SOLICITATION OF VOTERS ASSURED PASSAGE OF ALL THREE MEASURES--THE ENABLING ACT, ELECTION OF BOARD MEMBERS, AND THE BOND ISSUE. IN FALL 1967, DUPAGE COLLEGE, IN TEMPORARY QUARTERS, ADMITTED ITS FIRST STUDENTS. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN THE "AMERICAN SCHOOL BOARD JOURNAL," VOLUME 155, NUMBER 6, DECEMBER 1967. (HH)

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How to Launch a Community College

Ten superintendents initiated a project that persuaded taxpayers in diverse districts to vote for a college.

By Helen J. Anderson

Convincing taxpayers to vote more money for schools within their own district isn't easy. It's even tougher to convince taxpayers from diverse districts within a county to vote a college, and its financing, into existence. But it can be done.

Sometimes the success of such a project is literally in the cards — 3 x 5 file cards that contain names, addresses and telephone numbers of those favoring the proposal. Some cards are developed from petition signatures, others are signed during campaign meetings. They are sorted according to voting districts, then distributed to polling places where workers check them against the list of people who have voted. The card-recorded obvious "ayes" who haven't yet cast their ballot are gently jostled, via phone, to "get with it" before the polls close. Transportation and baby sitting service is available if needed.

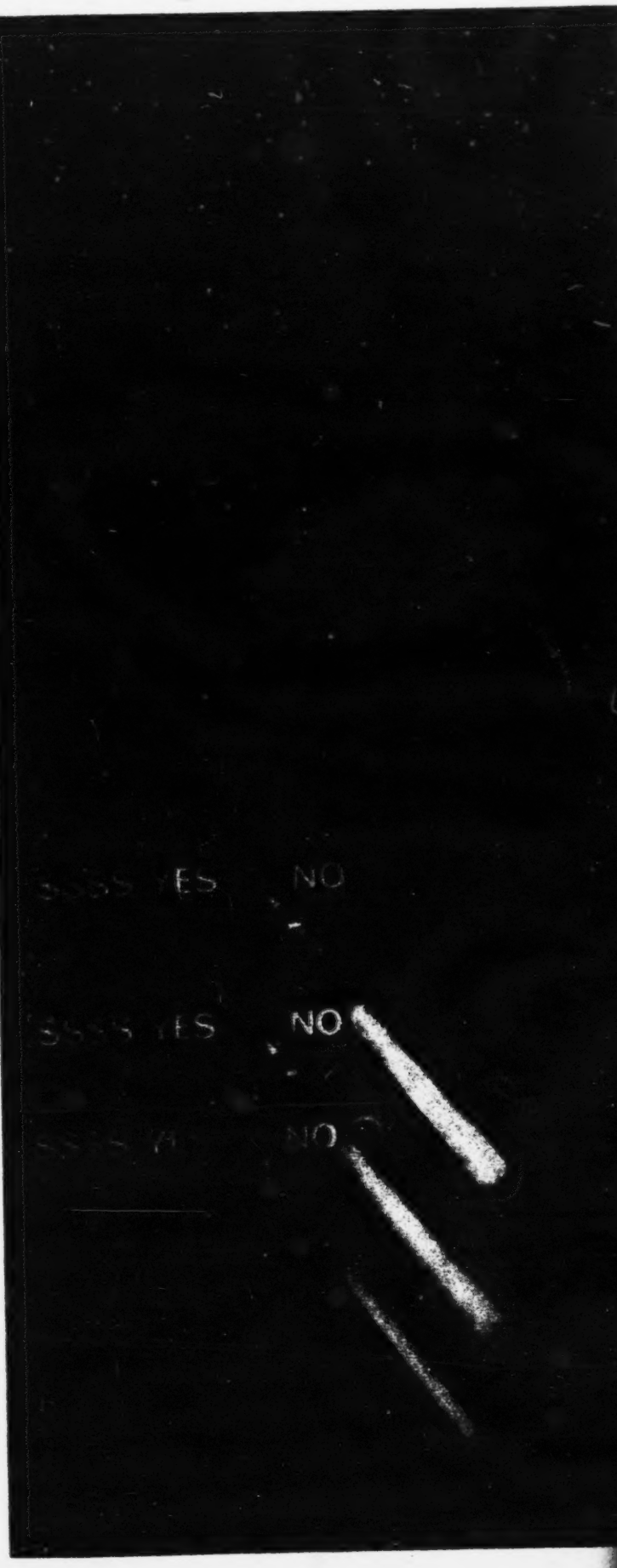
Knowing where the strength lay and promoting it was just one facet of a carefully organized program that recently gained a public-supported junior college for DuPage County in northeastern Illinois.

Credit for initiating the project goes to the county's ten high school superintendents who in 1964, aware of the ever-increasing squeeze in college admissions, looked beyond their own responsibilities of preparing youngsters for further education and asked, "Where can the kids go from here?"

Master Plan for Higher Education

Seeking a solution, they studied the Master Plan for Higher Education prepared by the 15-member Illinois Board of Higher Education which recommended a statewide system of junior colleges. School board members in each high school district studied the plan, too, then joined together to hire a consulting firm to check the feasibility of establishing such a school in their county. Cost of this service was to be split equally among participating districts. Survey results, including a recommended tax rate, signaled a green light, and the initiators tossed the ball to 19 citizens hand-picked by the boards, asking them to act as members of the steering committee for a DuPage junior college.

Chaired by Hinsdale's Austin Fleming, known as "Mr. Education" for his success in managing local bond issue



Mrs. Anderson is a free-lance education writer who lives in Hinsdale, Illinois.

drives, the committee met two evenings a month for four months to map campaign strategy.

Says Fleming: "We knew the road ahead would be rough. Whereas the usual school bond issue referendum is a one-shot deal, we had to get out the vote three times — first, to establish the junior college district and set the tax limits; then, to elect a seven-man college board; and, finally, to authorize the board to issue bonds up to $10 million to buy a site and construct and equip necessary buildings."

"Statistics on the upsurge of defeats of proposed school tax increases and bond issue referendums across the nation cast a chilling shadow," Fleming goes on, "and, in addition, we were faced with the problem of appealing to voters on all rungs of the economic and educational-interest ladder. Fortunately, the superintendents and their school boards had assembled a committee of civic-minded men and women, many of whom were experienced in fund raising. We were enthusiastic about our goal and approached it with a program keyed to emphasize the four big "M's" — machinery, money, message and manpower."

Machinery

Oiling the legal machinery was the steering committee's initial concern. The Junior College Act, which reimburses a community college district for 75% of the costs of site and construction and approximately 50% of the operating expenses, was before the state legislature and beginning to attract public attention. Of the opinion the measure would be enacted, the DuPage people were anxious to set the gears in motion so they could go before the electorate during high tide. Further, they felt they would be in a better position to secure a junior college by taking action rather than waiting for the state to decide where such schools should be located.

A petition addressed to the DuPage County superintendent of schools calling for an election to establish a junior college district with authority to levy taxes was drafted according to Illinois state outline, then submitted to attorneys for a legal interpretation of its accuracy. Following approval of the petition's form, printed copies were distributed to the committee for circulation, accompanied by maps showing boundaries of the district. Workers were given explicit instructions as to how petitions were to be signed.

"Committee members got far more than the minimum number of signatures," says Fleming. "This extra circulation of petitions gave us more names to add to the important 3 × 5 file cards."

Money

The budget committee, meanwhile, faced the problem of where to find the $15,000 estimated necessary to finance the campaign. The DuPage county school superintendent suggested contacting bankers, utility companies and businessmen in the area for funds, reasoning that banks and businesses would like to have a public college in the county because such a school attracts more families to an area and more families mean greater prosperity. He also felt businesses would welcome the steady supply of trained personnel the school could eventually provide. Volunteers stumped the territory and compaign dollars began to pour in.

Manpower

The committee then turned its attention to its single most important task, that of organizing manpower to deliver the message of the need for a junior college. Robert Peckenpaugh, campaign chairman, asked district school boards to supply the names of people who would be capable of acting as the nucleus of a strong citizen's committee in each area.

"We wanted responsible people experienced in campaign work. We needed leaders, those who could enlist others to work," says Peckenpaugh. "Because school board members are community leaders we knew they could furnish the names of others like themselves."

Board members and the people named by them received special invitations to attend public meetings which presented the need for a community college and the means by which it could be established. Out of the meetings local citizen's committees were formed and incorporated under the name of DuPage Community College Association.

In a memorandum to district chairman, Peckenpaugh outlined the personnel needs of the committees, suggesting the following appointments:

1. Campaign chairman to direct, coordinate, follow up
2. Organizational meeting chairman to schedule fall speaking engagements
3. Block organization chairman to arrange home calls
4. House meeting chairman to plan small, neighborly

meetings in private homes

5. Speaker's bureau chairman to select and train qualified individuals to speak before organizations
6. Publicity chairman to work in liaison with the general publicity chairman

Armed with the memorandum, as well as a timetable for activities, citizen's committees now carried the ball. Speaking dates were set up on club calendars, informal home get-togethers of 15 to 20 neighbors organized, block to block canvassing planned. At all events the 3 × 5 file cards were circulated for signatures of those who favored the community college idea.

Message

"A really effective campaign depends not only on the enthusiasm of workers but also on their knowledge of the subject they're promoting," Peckenpaugh declares. "We supplied them with three background bulletins which we asked them to read and memorize."

The bulletins were part of a massive public relations program designed to dispel the notion held by some that junior college provides second-rate higher education. The publicity chairman and his six-man committee set about to convince DuPage voters that a two-year college has the potential of excellence. One man was appointed to contact DuPage newspapers, one to contact other papers, TV and radio stations, another was in charge of materials. Other committee members prepared speeches and handled advertising.

The publicity chairman believes one of the most important tools supplied by his committee was the question and answer fact sheets distributed at club meetings. Other printed material included a direct mail piece sent throughout the county and a door hanger. Among the material piped to each citizen's committee publicity chairman was an instruction piece, and copy and art for an advertisement should the local group elect to insert one the week prior to the referendum. News releases also played an important role.

The Master Plan for Higher Education bills were passed by the Illinois state legislature in July, paving the way for the new Illinois Junior College Board to proceed with prescribed legal steps. Meeting in a special session, the college board recommended approval of the DuPage project to the state board of education. The necessary public hearing on the matter was held early in October and the referendum date set for the first Saturday in December.

Workers sewed up the vote during the campaign's final weeks by personally calling on neighbors, telling them about the referendum, leaving an information brochure and asking them to vote for the community junior college. Whenever a voter's response seemed favorable to the idea, a 3 × 5 card was filled out. The final contact, made just before the referendum, was distribution of door hangers which showed location of polling places and urged a vote for the proposal. Newspapers throughout the county headlined the results of the referendum which passed by a vote of 18,687 to 9,100. Members of the DuPage Community College Association immediately push to jump the next hurdle, an easier one because machinery, money, message and manpower — the four big "M's" — were meshed in smooth working order.

Caucus Selections

Nine men were nominated as candidates for the junior college board of education by a caucus representing the association. In making its selection, the caucus aimed for a balance of representation among districts, choosing people who could bring to the board a variety of training, experience and talent. Through a mailing to all DuPage County voters, the association promoted caucus selections by picturing the individuals and listing their qualifications.

Voter acceptance of the selections on January 29, 1966, was further proof that a carefully worked out plan pays off. To get out the right vote a second time, workers had once more contacted neighbors prior to election day, had again made use of the file cards.

Repetition of the entire process used to gain the first two favorable votes was a simple matter when the time came, in May, 1967, for the bond issue referendum, last in the series of steps to gain a junior college. The final campaign had the added advantage of college board members and faculty who spoke at meetings, giving audiences tangible evidence that the project existed.

By this time, too, there was money enough to hire a full-time public relations expert able to devote eight hours a day to carry forward the superb job begun by the publicity chairman and his committee.

Close Bond Issue Vote

Workers for the College of DuPage, new official name of the two-year school, correctly anticipated a closer squeak on the bond issue vote, for electorate opposition is always greater when it feels a pocket pinch. Bringing the district into existence had been approved 2–1; the bond issue passed by a 3–2 margin. The 3 × 5 cards, known strength, helped defeat unorganized opposition.

With more than two years of organized, concentrated effort behind them, sponsors of the College of DuPage handed the reins to the school's board of education.

This fall, the college opened the doors of its temporary quarters to its first students. At minimum personal cost, some will prepare themselves for a transfer after two years to another school where they can obtain a four-year college degree; others will take advantage of two years of school which will make them well-qualified for the business world. Hundreds of adults in the county will be able to continue their education through special courses. By 1980 an enrollment of 11,000 is expected. All will owe their educational opportunity to wise planners for the State of Illinois, and to the superintendents, school board members and interested citizens who, with foresight and enthusiasm, charted a good course and followed it faithfully, working in harmony. □

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December 1967

Features

4 Do School Districts Need An Ombudsman? Howard J. Grossman
A troubleshooter is suggested to make districts more responsive to citizen needs and wishes.

8 Modernizing Vocational-Technical Programs Virgil M. Rogers
Here is how two schools solved their problems.

12 A Tranquilizer for Negotiations John H. Metzler and Oscar Knade, Jr.
Structured consultative decision-making offers a mechanism for resolving differences with minimal conflict and pressure.

14 Food Service Facts Emaline K. Mohr
Some guidelines for busy school board members.

18 The Flexible School
Nathan Hale High School, West Allis, Wisconsin

22 How to Launch a Community College Helen J. Anderson
Ten superintendents initiated a project that persuaded taxpayers in diverse districts to vote for college.

25 How to Manage Change Jerrold M. Novotney
A change implementation model is offered as a guide in the bewildering perplexities of decision making.

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15 Washington Trends

27 Letters

28 New Publications

30 New Products

32 Editorial

35 Reader Service Section